DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 093 UD 028 123

AUTHOR Useem, Elizabeth L.
TITLE What a Difference a Recession Makes: The Rise and Fall of Integrated Services for At-Risk Youth in Massachusetts.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Agency Cooperation; At Risk Persons; Business Cycles; *Coordination; Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *Program Implementation; *Program Termination; State Programs; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Massachusetts; *Recession

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the implementation of an innovative integrated approach to the delivery of services for disadvantaged youth in Massachusetts, and examines the fiscal, political, and organizational factors that led to its subsequent demise. Massachusetts was one of the first states to envision and implement a statewide system of coordinated services for disadvantaged youth funded under the Federal Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA). A state Youth Coordinating Council (YCC) was formed in 1983 to create ongoing collaboration among youth-serving groups, to eliminate needless service duplication, and to bridge gaps in programs available to troubled youth. Despite problems, the YCC succeeded in encouraging interagency coordination during the mid- to late-1980s in the areas of vocational education, job training, adult literacy, early parenthood, and substance abuse. Efforts peaked with the creation of Commonwealth Futures, a dropout prevention initiative. Economic recession and the departure of key state personnel began to severely weaken the coordination effort in 1988. Public education, the core of the youth-serving system, was ravaged by budget cuts begun in 1989. Support for Commonwealth Futures was withdrawn at the local level and most of the collaborative activity came to a halt. In 1991, the bulk of funding was shifted away from integrated-services dropout prevention programs. Organizational and funding recommendations for protecting such initiatives in the future are made. A list of 13 references is appended. (FMW)

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What A Difference A Recession Makes: The Rise and Fall of Integrated Services for At-Risk Youth in Massachusetts

Elizabeth L. Useem

Associate Professor of Sociology

University of Massachusetts/Boston

and

Chair, Massachusetts Youth Policy Council

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Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

Chicago

April, 1991

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Numerous national commissions and educational researchers have stressed the need for the coordination of services for youth who are at-risk of entering adulthood without the skills and education necessary for gainful employment.(1) Clients typically need a range of services--counselling and mental health referrals, educational remediation, job training and placement assistance, family outreach, medical care, substance abuse treatment and prevention, among others--and these services have usually been delivered by multiple public and private agencies. Recognizing the ineffectiveness and duplication of these fragmented efforts, public officials in many states and localities have been trying to knit together services into a more coherent system so that youth have a better chance to respond positively to agencies' assistance efforts.

Massachusetts was one of the first states to envision and to try to implement a statewide system of coordinated services for disadvantaged youth. By the mid-1980s, the state was considered an innovator in this field.(2) The state strategy included a three-tiered approach to the provision of such coordinated services: collaboration at the state level through a Youth Coordinating Council (now Youth Policy Council), coordination at the local level through inter-agency planning teams which linked public schools with other groups, and case management at the individual client level in which one person monitored and orchestrated the sequence and mix of services.

Yet by the summer of 1990, only remnants of this effort remained. Innovative service strategies introduced with great fanfare and promise in the 1980s were dismantled. The drops in tax revenue brought on by an economic recession, significant and steady reductions in federal job training funds, flagging leadership from the outgoing Governor, the resignations or layoffs of experienced and visionary personnel all contributed to the demise of this initiative. The collaborative organizational structure, so promising when fiscal and political conditions were rosier, contributed to the severity of program cuts once these political and fiscal conditions began to deteriorate.

This paper describes the strategy and programs that were launched in the early 1980s and their subsequent demise. The focus here will be on the efforts made to prevent low income, low achieving youth from dropping out of school and to reach those out-of-school youth who have not completed high school. I will examine the fiscal, political, and organizational factors that have undermined this statewide strategy. The experience of Massachusetts is important, in part because it was a leader in the integrated services movement and because it had to cope with a recessionary downturn a year or two before most other states had to do so. There may be some lessons coming out of the Bay State experience which could be of assistance to other states.

Data Sources

Information from this paper comes from several sources: a) My own observations over the last eight years as a member of the state's Youth

Policy Council (formerly Youth Coordinating Council), including two years as its Chair; b) reports, internal memos, and evaluations relevant to coordinated services initiatives in Massachusetts; and c) telephone interviews (in March, 1991) with twelve current and former state officials who were involved with implementing the collaborative services model in Massachusetts.

The Rise of Integrated Services for Massachusetts' At-Risk Youth in the 1980s

Interest in coordinated services for at-risk youth began during the 1970s during the first administration of Governor Michael Dukakis when a "Policy on Youth Employment and Training" written by the State Board of Education and the State Employment and Training Council outlined the need for such a strategy.(3) The further elaboration and implementation of this approach, however, did not occur until Dukakis was returned to office (after a four year hiatus) in 1982. The substantial change in policies in employment and training brought about by the passage of the federal Job Training Partnership Act (which replaced CETA) in 1982 provided a vehicle by which newly appointed officials in the state's Office of Training and Employment Policy (OTEP) could craft a more coordinated response to the needs of disadvantaged youth. One small allocation provided for in that Act, the Eight Percent Education Coordination Grants, required that funds be set aside for use as seed money to promote coordination among schools, colleges, universities and the employment and training systems in programming for disadvantaged youth.

An inter-agency Education Task Force was set up to develop guidelines and models for the use of the Eight Percent money. The guidelines specified that joint programming among agencies and private sector companies was to be facilitated through the use of a competitive bid process in which cities and towns had to respond to a Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP in turn required that youth-serving agencies in the community band together to plan new programs and then to operate them. Subsequent monitoring and re-funding review boards were to look at client outcomes but also at the success of inter-agency collaboration as well. The hope was that this small pot of money (originally $2.9 million a year) could be used to leverage other funds and to build bridges between education and training agencies, the private sector, and human service programs and thus have far-reaching effects.(4)

The possibility of funding from the Ford Foundation through Public/Private Ventures for demonstration programs for at-risk youth spurred the development of a state Youth Coordinating Council (YCC) in 1983. Its 30 members came from the middle to upper management ranks of state agencies and educational institutions with a sprinkling of members from the private sector and community-based organizations. It was initially co-chaired by the state Commissioner of Education, the state Secretary of Economic Affairs and the chair of a local non-profit agency. Although the Ford money never materialized, four demonstration projects were established anyway, funded by the Eight Percent money and funds from the State Department of Education. The goal of the project was to create ongoing collaboration among youth-serving groups, to eliminate needless duplication of services, and to bridge gaps in programs available to troubled youth.

The Youth Council's structure and mission gradually evolved during the middle and late 1980s. Initially set up to oversee the four youth demonstation projects, it became a committee of the State Job Training Coordinating Council, and assumed oversight for all the Eight Percent grants (ten core programs during 1984-86 in addition to the four youth employment initiatives). Meeting monthly, and more frequently as standing committees, the YCC formulated a mission statement, wrote bylaws, reconstituted its membership to include all major youth-serving agencies, conducted a survey to facilitate coordinated activity for youth among state agencies, oversaw evaluations of Eight Percent programs, and reviewed the state Vocational Education plan required by federal regulations. The Council also sought ways to streamline state agency policies to make life easier for local program operators. For example, JTPA eligibility requirements were modified and simplified for youth under the legal jurisdiction of the Department of Social Services and the Department of Youth Services (which served court-involved young people); Eight Percent funds were used to expand client eligibility under the Welfare Department's initiative for pregnant and parenting teens in 1986; and local proposals for use of these funds were jointly reviewed. Perhaps most importantly, the Council served as a networking and information-sharing body so that personnel in various agencies came to know one another on a personal basis.

Yet, predictably, this collaborative effort was not without its tensions. The Massachusetts public environment is "highly competitive and 'turf conscious,'" making difficult under any circumstances to mount a collaborative effort.(5) Initially, there was sparring between the state's employment and training agency (OTEP) and the State Department of Education (DOE) over control of the Eight Percent money. OTEP was awarded control over the bulk of the funds, a decision which came out of the Governor's office, but this led to long-term resentment by DOE officials who believed that the money belonged in their agency (as was the case in the majority of other states). Another problem was that the Youth Coordinating Council was generally viewed as being controlled by OTEP, who provided staff, and was not seen as a truly a neutral inter-agency group. There was some effort to change that perception: meetings were held at neutral sites such as the Bank of Boston and the University of Massachusetts at Boston or were rotated among agencies; Council chairs were chosen from the private sector or from academe; and as Council members themselves became more experienced, and as Commissioners changed at OTEP, they exercised more control over Council affairs.

Other problems existed as well. Social service agencies at both the state and local levels were only marginally involved in the effort to provide integrated youth services around dropout prevention and employment training (although some local programs succeeded in doing so) despite many attempts to draw them in. Similarly, it was difficult to maintain consistent support from the private sector for Youth Council work, although in local programs some companies made significant contributions to youth employment and training projects. Top level state agency officials often skipped meetings and sent their designees, a problem endemic to all consortia of this kind. Youth Council members from points distant from Boston (where meetings were usually held) found it difficult to attend meetings on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, the Youth Council expanded its work and statewide coordination efforts of many types persisted and even flourished. A report prepared by the State Council on Vocational Education, for example, found that by 1987, real progress had been made in coordinating vocational education programs and the employment and training system.(6) Inter-agency coordination in adult literacy, teenage-pregnancy programs, and substance abuse efforts expanded significantly. The continuing commitment of Governor Dukakis to inter-agency collaboration along with the cooperative mind-set of many agency heads, especially the Commissioner of Education and Secretary of Economic Affairs, made the mid to late 1980s an unusually fruitful period for collaborative efforts.

State legislative leaders, looking for ways to save money and to streamline operations, also became major players in trying to end fragmentation in the state's training and employment related education delivery system. In 1986, the Leslature conducted hearings on this issue which led to the formation of the Cabinet Level Education and Employment Coordinating Committee. The subsequent recommendations of this groups resulted in the formation in 1988 of a mandated body, The Massachusetts Jobs Council (MJC), a cabinet-level group including the heads of education (both K-12 and higher education), human services, labor, and emploment and training. It is co-chaired by a private sector executive as well as the Secretary of Economic Affairs and also includes other private sector and labor members, and reports both to the Governor and to the Legislature. It is the state's highest level policy and coordination body for state training and employment programs. Thus, collaboration has been institutionalized for some aspects of employment training, including education and training efforts aimed at at-risk youth. Once the MJC was established, the Youth Coordinating Council, renamed the Youth Policy Council (YPC) was designated as its youth committee and its chair was given a seat on the MJC.

Attempts to develop a coordinated sequence of services for at-risk youth at the state and local levels peaked from 1986 to 1990 with the creation of Commonwealth Futures, a school dropout prevention initiative. Governor Dukakis had targeted at-risk youth, especially those who were dropouts, potential dropouts, and pregnant and parenting teens, as one of the key groups to receive services in order to "bring down the barriers" to poverty. The Futures initiative, developed under the purview of the Youth Policy Council, was announced by the Governor with considerable publicity, and projects were subsequently launched in 13 of the state's neediest communities.

Several aspects of Futures made it different and more promising than other programs aimed at reaching at-risk young people. It was not simply another project emanating out of one agency. Instead, it required broad-based inter-agency planning at both the state and community levels. At the state level, the initiative (always described as a "strategy" as opposed to a "program") was overseen by a Steering Committee headed by the Governor's Special Assistant on Education (the governor's highest ranking adviser on education since there is no cabinet-level secretary of education in Massachusetts), the Commissioner of Education, the Secretaries of Human Services, Economic Affairs, and Communities and Development, and the

Commissioner of Employment and Training. An inter-agency work group, a subcommittee of the Youth Policy Council, oversaw details of the effort. The Futures Director was hired by the YPC and the four-member staff worked out of the Governor's Office of Educational Affairs at the State House. From the beginning, Futures was perceived as a truly collaborative enterprise, not captured by any one state agency. Its location at the State House, its governing structure, and its origin as a Governor's initiative, gave it an unusual degree of neutrality and stature at the state level.

Funding sources for Futures also reflected its collaborative nature. These sources included the following: 1) a state Futures appropriation; 2) State Department of Education Chapter 188 Dropout Prevention funds; 3) Governor's Eight Percent Education Coordination Grants from the federal Job Training Partnership Act, administered by the state Department of Employment and Training (which now included the old OTEP); and 4) Edna McConnell Clark Foundation money for middle school dropout prevention programs. Futures staff succeeded in developing a common application proposal for local program providers whereby they could try to gain access to all of these sources of funds simultaneously. Thus, while the funds were not actually pooled, access to them was coordinated so that there was considerably less bureaucratic burden placed on community-level Futures staff. Allocations for the communities ranged from $125,000 to $436,000 in 1988-89, the peak funding year.

At the local level, communities applying for Futures money had to demonstrate that key players and agencies in that area (including the Mayor, the public schools, and the employment and training agency) had come together in a genuinely collaborative way to plan programs that would lower the dropout rate and reach those who had already left school. Futures stressed the concept that the school dropout problem was not just a problem for schools but was a critical issue for the community as a whole requiring a coordinated community response. In the majority of the 13 communities that were chosen as the recipients of funding, the Futures effort was based in the Mayor's office. The money that was available through Futures was to be "glue" money used to 1) facilitate collaborative planning among schools, agencies, employers, among others; 2) consolidate administrative costs; 3) provide greater fiscal and programmatic accountability; 3) leverage additional state, local and private sources of funds; and 4) develop a more comprehensive and consistent youth-serving system by eliminating gaps in services.

State Futures staff worked with communities in developing comprehensive, community-wide service plans and provided other kinds of technical assistance to speed the formation of inter-agency ties. The state-level inter-agency teams that reviewed Futures proposals in the competitive funding process looked closely at the degree to which community and school groups had come together to forge a common attack on the dropout problem. Communities were free to develop any set of programs they wished and, indeed, each of the 13 localities came up with different mixes of services. The Chairs and Managers of the local efforts met monthly to exchange ideas and analyze the programs with each other and with the state staff.

Another feature of the Futures effort that made it more than just

another dropout-prevention plan was that its goals included facilitating systemic school change. For example, Futures encouraged the restructuring of schools to create smaller and more nurturing units (e.g. clustering in the middle grades). In one district the collaboration had a major effect on school policy by restructuring the search process for a new superintendent, resulting in the hiring of an outside reform-minded superintendent. In this way, a relatively small allocation could bring about significant changes in a large-scale bureaucratic organization.

Although a third-party evaluation, commissioned by the Youth Policy Council, was conducted, it could not be a definitive assessment of the effort because the initiative had been off the ground for only two years. However, while acknowledging that Futures had not yet achieved success in meeting its lofty goals, the report concluded that it had "produced a model for integrating state programs to promote greater local coordination of activities" and had "strengthened existing state and community collaborations and promoted new ones."(7) Its success in bringing about a bureaucratically "simpler life" at the local level (e.g. the single application for funds), the forging of genuine partnerships in some of the communities, the identification of state policy barriers that impeded collaboration (e.g. rules of eligibility, confidentiality, monitoring and reporting, etc.), the systemic changes brought about in some schools, the heightened awareness within communities of the importance of the school dropout issue, and the more streamlined delivery of services to youth indicated that Futures was on the right track and deserved continued state funding for at least two more years. (It had originally been envisaged as a five year effort, with the hope that the changes it sparked would become institutionalized within that time-frame.) There was not as of yet a "single, comprehensive, integrated youth service system" but in many parts of the Commonwealth, providers of these services had begun to make connections with one another and develop program links.

The Unraveling

Just as real progress was being made, however, the effects of economic recession and the departure of key state-level personnel severely weakened efforts to provide a sequenced and coordinated youth service system. Drops in state revenues began to occur during 1988 as a recession started to take hold in Massachusetts and other New England states. Massachusetts had the lowest unemployment rate among the eleven major industrial states between 1983 and 1988 (the "Massachusetts Miracle") but this rate suddenly shot up during 1990 so that by early 1991, the state led all others in the nation in its rate of unemployment. (As of this writing, the state's unemployment rate is 9.3 percent). Despite several tax increases in the late 1980s, budget deficits remained substantial, leading to major spending cuts in nearly all state-funded programs. Education and youth programs were especially hard hit. State funding for public colleges and universities dropped 20 percent (27 percent when inflation is taken into account) between the academic years 1988-89 and 1990-91, the largest reduction of any public higher education system in the country.(8) An additional 20 percent cut has been proposed by Governor William Weld for 1991-92.

State support for K-12 experienced significant cuts as well: in 1987,

the state's share of school spending was 45 percent but by 1989-90 it was down to 35 percent, ranked 45th among the 50 states.(9) Governor Weld has proposed further reductions in state aid to education which would reduce this percentage to 28 percent and would place Massachusetts in 49th place among the states. These state reductions have not been offset by increases in local support since a tax cap allows only modest increases in property tax revenues. In 1990, tax overrides were successful in only 138 of the 533 communities where they were attempted. The condition of education has deteriorated substantially during the last three years: class sizes have risen, (reflecting both increasing elementary school enrollment and staff reductions), massive numbers of teachers have been laid off, counsellors and other "ancillary" personnel such as librarians and curriculum coordinators have been let go, art and music have been eliminated in many districts, and alternative programs for "at-risk" youth have been cut back or cut out entirely.(10) Twenty-one Massachusetts public high schools have been warned by an accreditation agency that they are in danger of losing their accreditation.

Thus, the core of the youth-serving system, the public schools, has been ravaged by these budget reductions and faces even more drastic downsizing in coming months. In addition, the 42 area offices of the state's Office for Children (each with its own volunteer Council and two paid staff) which oversaw a range of human services for children at the local level, were closed down in 1990. Local Youth Commissions, charged with providing counseling and other human services to children and teenagers and funded out of local budgets, are also being disbanded because of budget cuts in many cities and towns.

Commonwealth Futures has also become a victim of budget cuts. In fiscal years (FY) 1988 and 1989, the Futures state allocation was $1 million dollars. In FY1990 it was reduced to $800,000, and in the FY1991 budget it was cut out altogether. The other sources of Futures' funding experienced drastic cuts as well: the State Department of Education Chapter 188 grants for dropout prevention were cut from $2,250,000 in FY1989 to $553,000 in FY1991. The budget plan of Governor Weld reduces this amount by another ten percent in FY1992. The Eight Percent Coordination Grants from the federal Job Training Partnership Act were steadily reduced during the 1980s, from an initial grant in FY1985 of $2.9 million down to $1.4 million in FY1991. (Other JTPA funds, including Title IIB monies all of which go to summer youth programs, were cut 21-23 percent since FY1989 alone.)

Other state programs for at-risk youth have been decimated as well. State support for after-school programs (counselling, tutoring, work experience) for at-risk adolescents in housing projects was eliminated in FY1991, down from $1.25 million in FY89. State-funded human services programs affecting at-risk youth, such as therapeutic services to families and adolescents, family mediation, family planning, and therapeutic services to young parents also experienced substantial budget reductions.(11)

At the same time that state budget reductions began in 1989, Governor Dukakis announced he would not be a candidate for re-election in 1990, thus making him a lame-duck governor for almost two full years. This announcement spurred the departure of key officials from state government,

including some who were instrumental in forging inter-agency ties. The election of Governor William Weld in 1990, a moderate to conservative Republican, brought about wholesale personnel changes in upper and mid-level managerial personnel in state agencies, as he attempted to put his own stamp on state policies. Several middle level managers who had overseen integrated programs for at-risk youth voluntarily left state government service, discouraged by pay freezes and pay cuts and anticipating a changed policy climate. Other key people were laid off or terminated when their programs were de-funded. One third of the members of the Youth Policy Council, for example, left their positions (voluntarily and involuntarily) in state government during 1990 and 1991, and several of those who remain are concerned about the possibility of layoff or transfer. Staff support for the Council has been reduced drastically; one person gives a few hours a week to the task.

This kind of personnel turnover has undermined coordination efforts because the success of inter-agency collaboration at any level depends on the development of trusting, harmonious relationships among staff in different agencies. The networks that develop over the years can reduce the turf consciousness that perpetuates a fragmented approach to services. These ties often do not survive staff turnover. Moreover, they tend to atrophy when agency heads or executives fail to insist on a coordinated approach or when money that has been earmarked for collaborative enterprises is withdrawn. The tendency to withdraw into one's own agency and give up on the extra effort which coordination requires is ever-present. This is especially true when agency budget cuts are so great that even the core programs and mission of the agency are threatened. When that happens, extra-agency efforts become of peripheral concern to managers. In the case of Massachusetts, the severe drops in funding for education and programs for at-risk youth combined with the turnover of key personnel, have led, for the moment at least, to the virtual demise of the integrated services strategy at the state level.

At the local level, as support for Commonwealth Futures was withdrawn, much of the collaborative activity has come to a halt. While elements of Futures' initiatives remain in the public schools (nurtured in some cases by what still remains of technical assistance from the State Department of Education), inter-agency coordination has atrophied in most of the 13 communities. The de-funding of the Futures' coordinators' positions meant that it was much more difficult to sustain the collaboration. (Similarly, the loss of paid staff in the area offices of the Office for Children has led to the weakening of local coalitions which were implementing a state initiative to reduce teenage pregnancy.) Moreover, the notion of knitting together already existing services has become vastly more difficult as those services have eroded. The idea of an integrated services model assumes that there are teachers, counsellors, coaches, case workers, employment trainers, and substance abuse specialists already in place. But when massive layoffs and cutbacks occur in the human services sector (mental health services have been especially hard hit in Massachusetts) and education, there is very little left to coordinate.

Ironically, as the unraveling of a promising approach took place, the Youth Policy Council was not in a position to do much to stop it. This in

part reflects the nature of the Council's membership. Most of the active members of the Council were attached to state agencies and could not openly challenge the budget cuts which their agency heads had been forced to make. As cabinet secretaries and commissioners dutifully carried out budget reductions, they made decisions about priorities within the agency, and, as would be expected, they did not want to be criticized for these decisions in inter-agency meetings. Thus, although the Council took some steps to publicize the extent of the cuts in at-risk youth programs and did engage in some lobbying during the budget process, the Council could not be a strong advocacy group for at-risk youth. The very attribute that strengthened ties among agencies--having counterparts from different service areas meeting and overseeing programs on a regular basis--also led to its weakness when it came to lobbying efforts. Unfortunately, no other groups acted as consistent advocates for adolescents in State House budget deliberations: few voices were raised on their behalf during budget hearings.

In the case of Commonwealth Futures, which was probably the best example of a state and local initiative to provide coordinated services to at-risk youth, some of the organizational features which gave it its strength also contributed to its demise. State Futures' directors had emphasized the importance of its neutrality and had avoided placing the program under the aegis of a lead agency (although its state appropriation was technically in the Department of Education's budget), a decision that probably helped account for its success. Instead, the Futures office was located at the State House and was closely identified with Governor Dukakis. However, Governor Dukakis' influence slipped away after his defeat in the 1988 presidental election and his withdrawal from the gubernatorial race. The state's dismal revenue collection trends and the Governor's subsequent efforts to raise taxes contributed to his unpopularity among voters and legislators.

Thus, by 1990, the school dropout initiative no longer benefited from its close association with the Governor, and, more importantly it had no agency "home" where it might be protected during budgetary battles. When the Dukakis' top education adviser, who had supported Futures in earlier budget decisions, left government service, Futures no longer had a "champion." The other cabinet secretaries and commissioners who were on its Steering Committee were preoccupied with salvaging key programs in their own agencies.

When Governor Weld came into office in January, 1991, his need to cope with an $850 million dollar deficit for the current fiscal year and an additional $1.8 billion deficit (out of a $13+ billion budget) for the following year overwhelmed any interest in forging major new initiatives, let alone picking up old ones identified with the previous governor of the opposition party. Moreover, faced with a state economy where more than 4 percent of all jobs had been lost from the labor force in a single year (1990)--the largest drop since figures were first collected in the 1930s--his priorities for employment and training dollars emphasized job creation.(12) As of this writing, for example, the bulk of the Governor's Education Coordination Grants, the Eight Percent money (which were substantially increased in FY92 as a result of the higher unemployment rate) were to be shifted away from integrated services dropout-prevention programs

and instead to customized training for industries willing to move to or expand in Massachusetts. Managerial holdovers from the previous administration felt compelled to adopt this new strategy or mute their criticism of it.

No high-clout, highly visible statewide group existed that could advocate on behalf of at-risk adolescents and an integrated services strategy. Moreover, there was no non-partisan (or even partisan!) academic think-tank for youth policy in the state that could have assisted the new governor and his advisers (who were woefully inexperienced in educational policy) in assessing these issues.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Given the necessity of providing sequenced, coordinated services for at-risk youth over a number of years, how can policymakers across the nation design their efforts so that strategies and programs can survive the kinds of revenue downturns, personnel turnover, and the vicissitudes of political change that Massachusetts has been experiencing? What organizational configurations make sense to preserve the longevity of coordination?

It would be wise to have a state-funded Council or Commission on Children and Youth separate from the State Board of Education whose job it is to collect and disseminate information on the status of young people in the state as well as information on programs that are successful. This body, which should be made up managers from an array of youth-serving agencies (including schools) as well as "neutral" community people, academics, and private sector representatives, should also advocate on behalf of children and adolescents in the state budgetary process. At the state legislative level, there should be a Children's Caucus (as there is in Massachusetts and three other states) which works in tandem with the Commission on Children and Youth.

There should also be a nonpartisan academic "think-tank" (along the lines of the Center for Policy Analysis for California Education) which conducts research and provides expertise on policy issues affecting youth. Its financial support should come from government research grants, foundations, the private sector, as well as some state funds, and it should be affiliated with a major university. This unit would be a visible and readily available source of expertise to policymakers and would be invaluable when newly elected officials assume office. Both the Council and the "think-tank" would help assure a degree of long-term continuity in the vision and programming of youth-serving efforts.

Then there is the issue of where inter-agency efforts should be housed. One alternative is to opt for a neutral site where a genuine collaborative enterprise can develop free of the strictures of one bureaucracy. The stature and visibility of an initiative is enhanced if it reports directly to the Governor, bypassing traditional agency governance. As we have seen, however, this strategy carries with it significant risks since the fate of the initiative is tied to a governor's popularity and tenure. Further, without the support of a lead agency, it is more vulnerable to cutbacks when

the inevitable downturns in funding occur. Another alternative then is to house a program in a lead agency from the outset, but this is a risky strategy as well because the initiative may become "buried" there, thus losing its momentum and innovative character. Moreover, other agencies may turn away from the collaboration because it is so closely identified with one agency.

The best strategy might be to have efforts such as Futures spend one year as a neutral initiative with strong support from the Governor. After a year, the effort should seek an agency "home" where it is welcomed by the agency head and middle managers. This strategy worked for Governor Dukakis' teen pregnacy initiative, an effort which was picked up by the Executive Office of Human Services (EOHS) after a brief period as a freestanding program. The initiative was adopted by EOHS early enough in its history that the agency directors developed a real commitment to it. As of this writing, the program continues and Governor Weld has proposed that its funding be increased. This contrasts with the experience of Futures which never made the move to an agency, and with that of the Commonwealth Literacy Campaign (another one of Governor Dukakis' initiatives), a free-standing inter-agency collaboration (also reporting to the Governor) that moved into the State Department of Education much later in its history--perhaps too late--a fact that may have helped contribute to its demise in early 1991. Similarly, funding for the supportive services for youth in housing projects was never integrated into the operating budgets of housing authorities but the programs were funded instead through a line item in the budget of the state Executive Office of Communities and Development. When budget cutters went looking for possible savings, that line item was all too visible and vulnerable, and the services were completely eliminated.

Another organizational alternative is to place such initiatives in a quasi-public organization that has its own separate Board of Directors drawn from many constituencies--the private sector, the Legislature, community groups, and key youth-serving agencies. One example of such a partnership model in Massachusetts is the Bay State Skills Corporation, a quasi-public group founded in 1981 by the state Legislature to provide trained workers for high growth industries by bringing together state educational institutions, especially community college, with private companies in joint training efforts. Bay State Skills has twice survived a changeover in political leadership in the state in part because of its non-partisan, non-agency organizational structure. (It is also possible, however, that it survived mainly because of skilled leadership, its strong ties to the private sector, its economic development mission, and its "entrepreneurial" style. Perhaps if its mission had been school dropout prevention, it might not have lasted.)

Program continuity can also be enhanced when state agencies encourage the long-term professional growth of managers and administrators in education and in youth services who have a real commitment to state service. This means that salaries and benefits must be adequate and employees, insofar as possible, be protected from the threat of layoff. Such managers also need training, as graduate students and thereafter, in "inter-professional" studies (a strategy pursued at Ohio State University) so that they will have some knowledge of the operations of other youth-serving agencies.

Familiarity with the goals and procedures of other agencies will facilitate coordination efforts. These efforts will founder, even when agency heads promote them, unless middle-level managers endorse them as well.

The probability of survival of coordinated state-level initiatives for youth may also be increased if the time-lines of such attempts encourage the rapid institutionalization of the proposed change. Long-term timelines (such as five years or more) are too tenuous in the area of public policy because of the uncertainties of funding and leadership. States cannot afford the luxury of a lengthy planning process and endless pilot trials: by the time the pilot programs have been assessed and a planning process has occurred, political and fiscal support for a program may have died. If prior research for a program has already made the case for change, then the planning and experimental period should be brief and aspects of the program should be quickly integrated into the everyday operations of a school or other part of the youth-serving system. Outside funds should be used for a year or two to provide planning money, staff development, and technical assistance but after that existing staff should implement these new approaches.

In the area of dropout-prevention, for example, we know that clustering of students into smaller groups in middle and high schools, the establishment of alternative schools either on or off-site, and the provision of a coordinated array of referrals to services are all effective strategies.(13) In the time periods where the political will exists to implement such programs, youth-providers should seize the moment and institutionalize these initiatives. The Massachusetts State Department of Education has achieved some success with this approach. It has focused on systemic school change, which includes middle school reorganization, reducation of tracking, and changes in scheduling. While stand-alone discrete dropout-prevention programs have fallen by the wayside, the changes brought about by these internal school reorganization efforts have lived on.

Diversifying funding sources beyond those available from state resources is another strategy that aids the longevity of otherwise-fragile collaborative efforts. It is especially important to have private sector money (foundation or business) and federal money supporting such initiatives. As one former state official observed, "people will take care of you" if your program draws on external funding streams. Such was the case with Governor Dukakis' Alliance Against Drugs which was a $9 million collaborative program reporting directly to the Governor whose funds came exclusively from the federal government and business contributions. This initiative remained independent of state agencies and appears to have the support of Governor Weld. It has retained its status because of its funding sources and because of the nature of the issue of drug abuse itself.

Another way in which integrated youth-serving programs can increase the odds of surviving economic reversals and political vicissitudes is to develop strong regional policy groups that oversee youth policy. Local Private Industry Councils set up under the Job Training Partnership Act, for example, can provide this kind of leadership, especially if they have an active education committee and are adequately staffed. Some federal funds, notably money from JTPA and some vocational education funds, flow directly to

local and regional education or training agencies affiliated with the PICs and these local groups are in a good position to form coalitions of providers serving at-risk youth. These regional associations often have more political clout than a statewide group because they have the ear of their state legislators. If they act in concert, they can have considerable influence when state budgets and policy are being set.

Finally, it is always important to keep in mind that it is essential to have some "glue money" to forge partnerships of any kind, especially coalitions organized to serve relatively powerless populations such as disadvantaged adolescents. Even tiny amounts ($10,000-$50,000) can spur change in a district: meeting attendance improves significantly when decisions about money are being made! In small states, an allocation as small as $1 million can generate a good deal of inter-agency cooperation. Without some money, however, it is hard to sustain interest and commitment.

Even under the best of organizational circumstances, however, there are times where efforts on behalf of at-risk youth are reduced to a low ebb. Such is now the case in Massachusetts where, from the standpoint of advocates for these young people, everything went wrong at once. Those interviewed for this paper concurred that "there is no magic organizational bullet" that can save inter-agency initiatives. As one person put it, "organizational structures have different strengths and weaknesses and each has its time and place where it can be effective; but all can be vulnerable in a given time period." In the end, they argued, organizational configurations matter less than the kind of political and public support that has been developed and which can be mobilized for certain initiatives.

In Massachusetts, the severity and rapid onset of an economic recession combined with turnover in key political and managerial leaders swept away many of the advances that had been made in developing a sequenced system of services for low-achieving, low-income youth. Hopefully, few among the states will undergo this particular convergence of unhappy circumstances. While there is no definitive set of lessons emerging from the Massachusetts experience, perhaps the sobering experience there should cause policymakers in other states to think creatively and work even more energetically to build and sustain potent political constituencies for children and youth.

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